# Surgeon Grow: An American in the Russian Fighting

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**Abstract**
This article examines the wartime experiences of Dr. Malcolm Grow, an American surgeon in the Russian Imperial Army during World War I. Stoff contextualizes Grow's narrative within the broader historiographical neglect of Russia's Great War. Grow's account offers a rare frontline perspective, challenging traditional distinctions between combatant and non-combatant roles. While his memoir emphasizes military events, it also critiques the inadequacies of Russian wartime medical services. Stoff argues that Grow's experiences illuminate the complexities of Russia's total war and contribute to a deeper understanding of its human and institutional dimensions during the conflict

# Surgeon Grow: An American in the Russian Fighting

## Laurie S. Stoff

The remembrances of Dr. Malcom Grow, an American surgeon who served with the Russian Imperial Army for several years during World War I, serve as a valuable addition to our understanding of the war experiences on the Eastern Front. The war in the East is significantly underrepresented in publications on the Great War than that of the Western Front. While one may peruse shelf after shelf of memoirs, journalists' accounts, and scholarly assessments concerning the participation of Western nations in the First World War, the same cannot be said about Russia's Great War. Loath to celebrate an imperialist war, in fact, for many, merely perceived as prelude to revolution, the Soviet officials failed to engage in extensive official commemoration of the war akin to that of the British and French; Soviet historians similarly shied away from extensive analysis of the conflict. Western scholars, as a result of language barriers and general lack of attention to Eastern Europe, tended to focus their histories on Western actors. Russia's participation in the First World War was thus often overlooked, and ultimately overshadowed by the Revolution, and then, by the devasting impact of the Second World War.[1]

Nonetheless, the war in Russia deserves considerable attention (and in recent years, has begun to obtain it)[2], not only as a result of the fact that it was a primary area of conflict, but also because Russia's Great War was substantively different in numerous ways. Perhaps most importantly, the war was far from the stagnant trench warfare along a relatively stable front that characterized the combat in places like France. Rather, the conflict in the East was highly mobile. Indeed, as a result of the fact that the lines of battle moved too quickly, impeding on civilian territory too often, thus rendering obsolete any official attempts to separate the military

[1] Some recent works have demonstrated the extent to which there was some attempt at commemoration of the war in Soviet memory, including Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011, but overall, the number of scholarly works devoted to the study of Russia's Great War is significantly smaller than that of Western nations.

[2] There have been a number of works focusing on Russia's World War I experience published over the last several years. One major scholarly effort being undertaken is the series *Russia's Great War and Revolution*, which is in the process of publishing over twenty volumes dedicated to various aspects of the war in the East.

Malcom C. Grow, Lt.-Col, Imperial Russian Army Medical Corps

zone from the civilian in the Russian theater of war, we are forced to rethink the very definition of the "front" and challenge its traditional separation from "rear" or "home front" as spaces outside the war zone. It suggests that an entirely different conceptualization of "front" is necessary—one in which temporality and functionality are the primary determinants rather than physical place and space. Furthermore, the nature of this "total" war also challenged conventional demarcations between "combatant" and "non-combatant," significantly blurring lines that artificially separated participants in warfare.

Grow's commentary thus presents us with a first-hand account of wartime experience that is a welcome contribution to a growing body of new literature

on the history of the war and revolution, and that challenges us to reconsider Russia's participation in the conflict. His account highlights a number of pertinent issues of Russia's experience of total war, particularly those concerning the need to redefine our understandings of ossified categories of both primary actors and spaces in wartime. Unlike most other foreigners' accounts of Russia during the war, primarily written by journalists, diplomats, or civilian observers who spent little, if any, time at the "front," Grow's narrative provides a somewhat unique commentary on the experience of war from the intimate perspective of someone embedded with the Russian troops. Therefore, not only does it focus additional necessary attention on the region, it reveals much about war experience. While military historiography is replete with studies of battle plans and strategies, troop movements, numbers of casualties, territorial gains, and decisions of state actors, war is so much more than these, as one of the most influential events in the human experience. Serving with a frontline medical unit attached to combat troops meant that Grow was "right in the thick of it," experiencing the fighting up close. Although he was a surgeon and his mission with the Russian Army was as a regimental doctor, which ostensibly meant his primary concern was with medical care of wounded and ill soldiers, Grow's narrative focuses much attention on the fighting, particularly his experiences observing operations from the trenches, but also occasionally being drawn into the fighting. His work as a doctor is not completely neglected, and there are passages that detail his efforts to serve the wounded, but his story often centers more on military aspects of his experiences. One might speculate that he thought his readers more interested in hearing about the fighting, the close calls with danger, the shelling, his encounters with enemy soldiers, than the medical treatment he was providing. But perhaps a more convincing explanation is that the lines of separation between combatants and non-combatants are wholly inadequate, as members of groups such as medical workers were exposed to dangers, deprivations, physical, and psychological traumas that paralleled the experiences of combatants. As such, Grow's book demonstrates clearly the problem with such strict separations of categories and expands our understanding of war experience considerably. Grow also offers observations concerning the Russian Revolutions of 1917, in particular, their impacts on the troops and the fighting capacity of the army.

**A Brief Biographical Sketch**

Malcom Cummings Grow was born November 19, 1887 in Philadelphia. He received his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in 1909, having specialized in internal medicine. When the First World War began, he was in private practice in his home city. In August 1915, he visited Washington, DC, where he became acquainted with Dr. Edward Egbert, who at the time was serving as Chief Surgeon of the American Red Cross Hospital in Kiev and was on a brief leave. Egbert described the dire situation concerning Russia's military medical services, particularly its shortage of qualified doctors, and persuaded Grow to offer his expertise to the war effort there. Grow was sympathetic to the Russian plight, while also eager for the opportunity to further develop his surgical skills

and lured by the excitement of war. As a result, he agreed to accompany Egbert back to Russia. One month later, he arrived in the Russian capital, Petrograd.[3]

Initially, Grow served as a civilian doctor at one of the medical facilities (which he called the "Hussar Hospital")[4] located at Tsarskoe Selo, a small suburban village outside of Petrograd where one of the Imperial palaces (Tsar Nicholas II's preferred residence) was located. Working safely behind the lines was not what he had in mind and therefore he began pursuing the opportunity of joining the Russian military at the front. He was introduced to Colonel Andrei Ivanovich Kalpashnikov-Camac (Kalpaschnecoff in Grow's writing), a noble scion from a prominent Penza family. Kalpashnikov's connections in both American and Russian society undoubtedly made him a logical choice to help Grow achieve his goal. His mother was a godchild of Tsar Alexander II and descended from Peter the Great's mother, while his father's sister married Philadelphia notable John Burgess Camac, with whom Kalpashnikov lived in Paris until the age of 12 (after which Camac was officially added to his family name). After attending law school in Russia, Kalpashnikov was sent to Washington as an attaché to the Russian embassy. In 1913, he was transferred back to Petrograd to serve in the foreign office. When war broke out, although exempt from military service as a result of his diplomatic status, he volunteered for service in the Russian Red Cross. Despite the fact that he had no medical training he was assigned as commander of the 21st Flying Column, attached to the 1st Siberian Army Corps. [5] Grow convinced the

[3] The original name of the city, St. Petersburg was changed when the war broke out because it sounded too "German."

[4] Most likely, Grow was referring to the infirmary of the Life (Imperial) Guards of the Hussar Regiment. There were more than 80 other medical facilities established at Tsarskoe Selo and in neighboring Pavlosk during the war. The Empress Aleksandra Feodorovna, who trained as a nurse along with her two eldest daughters Olga and Tat'iana, organized Hospital No. 3 in the palace itself. There was a separate officers' wing organized in one of the outbuildings of the Palace Hospital. There were also medical facilities established in the Charitable Home for Disable Warriors, the Officers' Artillery School, the Serafim Refugee Shelter No. 79, the Cathedral of St. Fedorov, the Holy Trinity Sister of Mercy Community, and the private homes of S. P. Shuvanov, E. G. Volters, and the Kokorev mansion.

[5] During and after the war, Kalpashnikov continued his American connections. In 1916, he led a successful mission to the U.S. to raise funds for the purchase of American ambulances for the Russian Red Cross. In September 1917 he went to Jassy (Iasi), Romania, to serve as a representative of the Russian Red Cross at the headquarters of the American Red Cross, and remained there until just after the October Revolution, when he returned to Petrograd. He was arrested in late December 1917 and held for several months on false charges of taking American money to fund opposition to the Bolsheviks and tsarist sympathies. He made a failed attempt to escape his prison cell in the Peter and Paul Fortress, and was only saved from being shot by the fact that the Bolshevik government was in turmoil in the process of moving to Moscow. After being interrogated by Felix Dzerzhinskii, head of the Cheka (secret police) he was released at the end of April 1918. After narrowly escaping re-arrest, he fled Russia with false papers and moved to the United States. See George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920. Vol. 1, Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 191-218 and Andrew Kalpaschnikoff [sic], *A Prisoner of Trotsky's* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company,

Colonel that he could be of more use at the front and as a result of Kalpashnikov's efforts, received a military appointment, commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel in the Imperial Russian Medical Corps.

Grow possessed no military experience and spoke very little Russian,[6] but nonetheless was able to secure a fairly high rank in the Russian Imperial Army Medical Corps as well as a position in a frontline medical unit, largely as the result of his acquaintance with the "right" people. He related how Colonel Kalpashnikov was able to cut through the notoriously heavy bureaucracy of the Russian Red Cross, barraging his way through the offices of the administration, brushing aside secretaries like flies, until he had the ears of the top brass, who readily complied with his request to commission Grow and dispatch with Kalpashnikov's flying column to replace the surgeon he had just lost in the field. The shortage of qualified surgeons in Russia undoubtedly made this a more compelling case. Grow served as regimental surgeon under Kalpashnikov on the Russian Western Front, where the army was engaged against the Germans, and then was transferred with the unit to the Southwestern Front to fight the Austro-Hungarians in the massive offensive that took place in the spring of 1916.

Grow left Russia and went back to the United States briefly in 1916 on leave, and then again in January1917 in an attempt to secure supplies and vehicles to transport wounded soldiers for Russia's medical services. He was held up in Christiana, Denmark, however, as a result of a German blockade and forced to remain there until March. As a result, he was not in the country when the February Revolution that brought down the tsarist regime occurred. Rather he received news of it while awaiting permission to depart for the U.S. In July 1917, he returned to Russia, serving as part of an American Red Cross mission in Vladivostok. He was anxious to reunite with his old unit at the front and did so in August for a week. Distraught by what he witnessed there, he went back to Petrograd, but then left Russia permanently and returned to the U.S. before the October Revolution.

Back in the United States, Grow joined the U.S. Army Medical Services. After a number of years of service, he achieved the rank of general. In 1934, he was appointed the Chief Flight Surgeon of the Army Air Corps, a position he served in until 1939. Along with Major General Harry Armstrong, he established the Aero Medical Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. While working there, Grow was instrumental in the development of light body armor and steel helmets to protect air combat crews from wounds incurred by low-velocity missiles. The work he did in this area yielded him the Legion of Merit.

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1920). For more on the American Ambulance, see Joshua Segal, "American Humanitarian Volunteerism in Russia's Military 1914-1917," Ph.D. Diss., George Washington University, 2018.

[6] Grow may have spoken French or German, particularly the latter, which was often required in medical schools at the time, and which would have given him some ability to communicate with officers of the Russian Imperial Army. This cannot be confirmed, however. Nonetheless, he seems to have picked up enough Russian, and there were individuals with sufficient command of English, to allow him to function fairly effective embedded with the Russian corps.

He also earned the Distinguished Service medal for his role in creating a number of innovative items used to protect combat personnel from a variety of hazards. Additionally, he established a new system of rest homes, a special pass system and training for medical officers in tactical unit.

In 1945, Grow was appointed acting Air Surgeon for the Army Air Forces and Air Surgeon in 1946. He then became the first Surgeon General for the U.S. Air Force in 1949 and served in that role until November of that year. Grow retired from the Air Force in December, 1949 and passed away in October 1960. The Malcolm Grow Medical Center at Andrews Air Force Base is named in his honor.

**Grow's Experiences on the Russian front**

Dr. Grow arrived in Russia after that country had already been fighting a total war for an entire year and was struggling considerably against its adversaries. From the very start of the conflict, Russia experienced serious problems with the production and distribution of supplies and support service, resulting in shortages of weapons, ammunition, artillery, food, and other materials necessary to wage mechanized warfare. The tsarist administration and military establishment were weighed down by inefficiency and corruption. Additionally, poor leadership and bad strategic planning plagued nearly all levels of the military and the industrial system that was supposed to support it. The result was that the nation struggled considerably against the better-trained and equipped Germans. The Russian Imperial Army had suffered significant defeats at the hands of the Germans in a number of battles during the first year of the war. Particularly devasting blows came at the hands of the Germans at Tannenburg and the Masurian Lakes in the fall of 1914. Greater success was achieved against the Austro-Hungarian Army in Galicia and Bukhovina. But the Central Powers launched a massive offensive in April 1915, the result of which was a sustained retreat by the Russian Army for the next five months, during which Russian forces were pushed back hundreds of miles. Thus, when Grow finally arrived at the front, although it had finally stopped retreating, the army was stinging from its significant losses: casualties of over one million, another million captured, and the loss of extensive territory in Poland, Lithuania, and Belorussia.[7]

Indeed, Russia struggled throughout the war to provide its military with adequate medical care. Upon the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914, the Russian government began mobilizing resources and personnel for the war effort. However, similar problems of production and distribution of goods and obstacles in organization and provision of services affected medical work. Russian officials were caught somewhat off-guard by the scope of total war (despite warnings from those who had experienced these difficulties in the Russo-Japanese War) and had not correctly anticipated the vast numbers of medical personnel, facilities,

[7] On the military aspects of Russia's Great War, see Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (New York: Scribners, 1975), David R. Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War: The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2015), and Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2015).

equipment, and supplies that would be required. The extensive scale of the war coupled with the lack of experience and reluctance to utilize civilian sources of support often hindered efficient provision of medical services.[8] This would prove troublesome for the Russian armed forces, which suffered particularly high casualties: by September 1917, the numbers of Russian troops wounded in the war was approximately 2.5 million and another 2.3 million soldiers had fallen ill as a result of the spread of highly contagious epidemic diseases (typhoid fever, typhus, cholera, and dysentery, as well as other illness such as pneumonia or scurvy).[9] For many (both the soldiers who contracted them and the medical personnel who treated them), these illnesses proved fatal.[10] Ultimately, this caused a breakdown in public health and contributed to an already shaky confidence in the tsarist system to meet the needs of its people.

Because the Russian military medical corps was significantly underprepared for the treatment of the millions of ill and wounded soldiers that soon flooded in, it quickly became reliant on a number of civilian organizations to supplement care. These included the Russian Society of the Red Cross and a number of voluntary organs associated with the Union of *Zemstvos* and the Union of Towns (collectively known as *Zemgor*), which played vital roles in the provision of wartime services. *Zemgor* organs were an amalgam of local efforts, charged with medical, sanitary, and food provisioning duties for both the military and civilian populations.[11] They were staffed by some professionals, but many more volunteers, including thousands of women, who received very quick and cursory training before being put to work.

Despite the good intentions and positive actions of these groups, as well as the intense need for their services, the autocracy as well as the military establishment remained wary of them (and most civil society efforts) and their staffs of liberal professionals, many of whom opposed the tsarist system. In attempt to maintain centralized control over wartime medical services, the Russian Society of the Red Cross, the most trusted of these organizations (although not immune to problematic relationships with government and military authorities) was assigned sole responsibility over the front and given exclusive authority to operate across the line of demarcation that was supposed to separate the active war zone from the rear.[12] All other organizations providing medical services were limited to

[8] John F. Hutchinson, *Politics and Public Health in Revolutionary Russia, 1890-1918,* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 110.

[9] Tsentral'noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie, Otdel Voennoi Statistiki, *Rossiia v mirovoi voine, 1914-1918 goda (v tsifrakh)* (Moscow: Tipografia M.K.Kh. imeni F. Ia. Lavrova,1925), 25.

[10] Tsentral'noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie, *Rossiia v mirovoi voine, 1914-1918 goda (v tsifrakh)*, 99.

[11] For more on the *Zemgor* organizations, see William Gleason, "The All-Russian Union of Towns and the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos in World War I, 1914-1917," Ph.D. Diss., Indiana University, 1972.

[12] The highly mobile nature of the war on the Eastern Front, unlike the more stagnant positional warfare of the Western Front, made this largely impossible and impractical, as frontlines shifted quickly and often.

evacuating soldiers away from the front and treating them in the rear. The central government's original desire was to cut off the rest of the country from the regions directly affected by the war. The Union of *Zemstvos* and the Union of Towns thus were placed under the "flag" of the Red Cross, in a subordinate position to the latter, and in the rear only. These organizations and their personnel suffered from conflicts with the central government, the Red Cross, and with one another. Even the Russian Imperial Army, despite its dependence on such aid, expressed resistance, and was somewhat hostile to interference from civilian quarters. The Russian Red Cross in particular had been unable to overcome pre-war accusations of corruption, ineptitude, and acting to curry political favor that had convinced some military medical officials that the Russian Red Cross was a "weak entity" that had "lost its constructive energy," and was unable to undertake effective action.[13] The overly bureaucratic nature of the Russian Red Cross beleaguered the organization and meant that the smallest actions required permission from some higher authority. Waiting for such approval was often painstakingly long and prevented medical personnel from carrying out important activities when immediately necessary.[14]

Shortages of trained medical personnel, especially doctors, were particularly acute in the Russian military medical corps. Thus, the appeal made by Grow, an experienced surgeon, to join the efforts at the front, was likely welcomed by Russian officials. Nonetheless, assignment to a frontline unit was seen as a turn of good luck. Even Dr. Egbert, who had convinced him to give up the safety and security of his private practice in Philadelphia and join the war effort in Russia expressed his jealousy at Grow's frontline assignment. Egbert lamented that he was stuck in a rear hospital while Grow was going to where the "real" action was. Such sentiments were fairly common among medical workers in Russia, as many were reluctant to serve in establishments on the "home front" and wanted to be as close to the fighting possible. While many were able to fulfil this desire, others had to be content with staying in the cities and towns, since wounded soldiers only received cursory medical treatment at the frontlines before being dispatched to the rear for further treatment, surgery, and recovery.

Despite the seeming wisdom of such a strategy, ostensibly done to remove the wounded from areas of continued danger and provide them with more comprehensive care, it was not effectively implemented. At the beginning of the campaign, there were very few frontline units of the Red Cross. Military commanders were often reluctant to send non-military organizations and personnel into the war zone. With insufficient numbers of Red Cross units at or near the front, and with the Red Cross (at least initially) being the only non-military organization allowed in active frontline areas, other groups equipped to offer medical support for the army found themselves unable to extend that aid

[13] "Otchet doktora meditsny S. K. Solov'ev, zaveduiuvaiushchii meditsinkoi chastiu severnom front," RGVIA f. 12674, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 374-377.

[14] M. N. Vasilevich, *Polozhenie russkikh plennykh v Germanii i otnoshennie Germanstev k nasileniiu zaniatykh imi oblastei Tsarstva Polskago i Litvy* (Petrograd: 1917), passim.

until they received permission to enter the war zone. This also made it difficult to transport the wounded and ill from the front to medical facilities behind the lines. This problem was complicated by the fact that many of the mobile medical units were only able to perform cursory triage and provide temporary care. According to the medical war plans, this was the sole purpose of such units. Patients who needed further treatment and time for recovery were to be transported to interior medical facilities, more permanent and extensive establishments in the rear. This was often impossible, as advances and retreats of troops often cut off these mobile units from roads and railways, forcing them to hold patients much longer than was medically sound, without the resources or ability to provide necessary continued or more complex treatment. Weeks would often go by before the wounded could be evacuated to facilities that did possess such capabilities. President of the Russian Duma (parliament) Mikhail Rodzianko was appalled when, at the Warsaw-Vienna railway station he came across hundreds of wounded men laying on dirty straw in the rain on the platform, receiving little to no medical attention, some with wounds that had remained undressed for five days.[15] Other times, mobile medical units were physically unable to get to casualties who remained on the battlefields until long after the action subsided. Medical personnel risked their lives extracting the wounded from the battlefields and treating them in frontline dressing stations, as the enemy did not abide by Geneva Convention protocols that prohibited attacks against them and Red Cross facilities.

Despite the dangers of serving on the frontlines, Grow seemed to relish these experiences. He was wounded and even temporarily lost his hearing, serving in dressing stations that were extremely close to the fighting and that came under enemy fire. He even shot an enemy officer. His efforts were rewarded by the Russian Imperial government, receiving both the Order of Saint Stanislaus, 3rd class with swords and the Cross of St. George, 4th class, for gallantry in action.

**Grow's Commentary on Russia and Russians**

As an American doctor serving with the Russian Army, Grow seemed endlessly fascinated by Russia and its people. He made a number of remarks about Russian culture and customs, often taking time to explain to the reader aspects of Russian daily life, particularly at the front. He seemed to genuinely enjoy the new experiences he had, the food and beverages he sampled, the rituals associated with socialization, and other elements of daily life. While he did his best to provide exposition for what he assumed to be an audience unfamiliar with Russian traditions, his narrative suffers from some weaknesses and inadequacies. He consistently misspells Russian words, names, and places—usually defaulting to a phonetic interpretation that does not always match closely to the actual verbiage. Somewhat questionable as well is his repetition of dialogue and conversation by Russians, particularly that of common soldiers and low-ranking medical personnel such as orderlies, who likely spoke no English (or other languages such as German or French that Grow may have known). Since Grow did not initially

[15] M. V. Rodzianko, *The Reign of Rasputin: An Empire's Collapse*. Trans. Catherine Zvegintzoff (Gulf Breeze, Fl.: Academic International Press, 1973), 112-116.

speak Russian, we must take his early reports of things said by these individuals either as translations provided by the few officers and other personnel who did know English, or as Grow's interpretations of what was said based on context, body language and other cues he might have used. As a result, it is likely that at least some of what he reported as speech originating from average Russians was inaccurate. Grow did seem to pick up some Russian language as he served, and eventually, his ability to converse with the average Russia improved. Therefore, his later reportage might be more accurate

Perhaps more importantly, as an American, Grow orientalizes Russia and Russians to a great extent—so even while he applies positive attributes to them, they are still framed as the inferior "other" against the standard of the West and his paternalistic, patronizing attitude pervades much of his commentary. "The Russian is a simple-minded, childlike individual, but he is also an idealist and at heart he loves his fellowmen. Being primitive, his passions, either of love or hate, admiration or scorn, are naturally colossal. He is also sensitive to extraneous influences," he remarked (pp. x-xi). His comments reflect very common stereotypes and simplified conceptualizations about Russian soldiers, strong, stoic, patriotic, willing to endure great hardships, loyal, but simple, even primitive. These are consistent both with conceptions held by Westerners about Russian people in general at this time, as well as with Russian elite attitudes about peasant-soldiers and pro-war attitudes expressed in patriotic publications. While Grow's work was published in the U.S. and therefore not required to pass the kind of censorship controls that Russian works were subjected to during the war, his commentary is entirely in line with the official rhetoric about the war.

Grow also reflected very common attitudes of the Entente, including the pro-war public in Russia, concerning the Germans and their "barbarity" during the war. He expresses some surprise at the acts of a supposedly "cultured" people, such as bombing and shelling Red Cross facilities, commenting that should they have been "wild savages" such as Africans, he would have not been shocked. These were widespread notions that, from the beginning of the war, were used as propaganda to drum up support for the war.[16] Grow therefore is very much a product of the time and place in which he operates.

Somewhat surprisingly, despite the fact that in the provision of medical services in Russia during the war female nurses outnumbered doctors three to one, and many thousands served on the front lines, Grow only mentioned encountering nurses once, and that was during his brief service in the "rear." Although official regulations sought to keep them at least three to four miles behind the lines, women were often found in medical units very close to the fighting. Thus, while frontline units like Grow's flying column were supposed to be staffed by male

[16] On wartime propaganda, see Stephen Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006) and Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

personnel, with medical students and orderlies providing support to doctors, in many cases female nurses ended up comprising the staffs of these units.[17]

Of the nurses he did mention working with in the hospital at Tsarskoe Selo, however, Grow was very adulatory, commenting:

> All the nurses except one were titled women who, at the beginning of the war, had taken the six months' training course required to become a war-sister. They had given up everything else and devoted themselves resolutely to the task in hand.
>
> The exception was a lady who had been a professional nurse for many years, and who acted as assistant in operations and had charge of the operating room . . . All of the sisters spoke English perfectly, many of them having received their education in England and all having travelled and spent much time there. This was a great relief to me and in conjunction with the charming friendliness and courtesy with which I was received quickly put me at my ease. (pp. 21-22)

He complimented them on their expert work, which contrasts with some other Western observers of Russian medical services in general and nurses specifically, who were sometimes critical of lack of advanced knowledge and other deficiencies of the Russian medical system. Grow stated, "The sisters worked like veteran nurses and everything in the operating-room was like clock-work" (p. 22). The nurses in his view were "tireless," "patient," and "gentle." He remarked that "these women, not one of whom before the war had ever done a stroke of disagreeable work or even had to experience anything unpleasant, went about their tasks cheerfully and smiling, always gentle and kind, caring for those peasant soldiers as though they were their very own children" (p. 28). However, he did note that the Russians suffered from hindrances to proper care resulting from deficiencies in supplies, medicine, and equipment.

Aside from these nurses, women are nearly completely absent from other aspects of his narrative. Other than the (very) occasional encounter with a peasant woman or two, Grow's narrative suggests that he operated in an almost exclusively male preserve. He did mention a woman doctor who was serving in

[17] See for example N. Chelakova, "Iz zapisok sestry miloserdii," *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* (June 1969); Florence Farmborough, *With the Armies of the Tsar: A Nurse at the Russian Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1918* (New York: Cooper Square, 2000); Khristina Semina, *Tragediia russkoi armii pervoi velikoi voiny 1914-1918 gg. Zapiski sestry miloserdiia kavkazskogo fronta*; Violetta Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Column: Being the Journal of an English Nursing Sister in Belgium and Russia* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915); Lidia Zakharova, *Dnevnik sestry miloserdiia (na peredovykh pozitsiiakh)* (Petrograd: Izdatel'stvo biblioteka "Velikoi Voiny," 1915) among others. For more on nurses during the war in Russia, see Laurie S. Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More than Binding Men's Wounds* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

the Hussar Hospital at Tsarskoe Selo. This seems odd, especially since, according to an article about Col. Kalpashnikov's flying column, the very unit with which Grow served, there were two nurses among its personnel.[18] Yet Grow never even mentioned them. It seems that he did not serve directly with them, despite their presence in the unit.

The other exception to this near total absence of women in Grow's book is a photograph of a young female volunteer with a caption describing her actions. Having disguised herself as a man, she entered the 1st Siberian Army Corps and fought alongside her male compatriots until she was discovered after being wounded in a battle near the town of Postovy and treated at Grow's dressing station. However, this woman, nor the thousands of others who served as soldiers in Russia's Great War, never made it into Grow's narrative. Why he believed that she deserved a picture with a short caption, but little exposition, is unknown. Grow also fails to mention the most striking example of female combat participation, the organization of several all-female units by the Provisional Government that took power following the fall of the tsarist government in the summer of 1917.[19] The all-female battalions were media superstars for the short period of their existence, reported on in publications from Petrograd to New York, and mentioned in most of the other foreign observers' accounts of Russia at this time, and thus is it highly unlikely that Grow would not have heard about the,. One such unit, the 1st Russian Women's Battalion of Death, was even assigned to fight with the 1st Siberian Army Corps, the very unit to which Grow's flying column was attached. Therefore, again, it is somewhat puzzling as to why Grow leaves them out of his book. One may speculate that Grow's conceptualization of war was a masculine one, and therefore left little room for women, despite their actual presence and participation.

**Revolution**

Grow's memoir not only gives us insight on the experiences of a doctor on the Russian front and a participation in the action of the war, but also glimpses of the turbulent events of the revolutions of 1917. Again, we must take care in accepting his observations uncritically, as they reflect many of the misconceptions and stereotypes of the moment. Grow maintained the idea that Russian soldiers were completely loyal to the tsarist government and served well, with no thought of *not* carrying out their duty, until *after* the February Revolution (despite the fact that he was not even in Russia when it occurred, having left in January and did not return until July). He seemed entirely surprised by the revolution and taken aback by what he saw as a sudden transformation of the once formidable, obedient, and long-suffering Russian troops to a chaotic, undisciplined, petulant,

[18] "Young Hero Tells of Russia's 'Flying Column' of Red Cross," *The Nashua Reporter* (Nashua, Iowa), January 25, 1917, 5. My thanks to Joshua Segal for directing me to this source.

[19] For more on women soldiers in Russian during the First World War, see Laurie S. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

unruly mob. Problems and failures of the Russian military are attributed almost exclusively to nefarious foreign forces working to sabotage Russia's war effort. He blames all the dissatisfaction and disruption of military and lack of morale on German agitation. He thus presented the revolution as simultaneously coming out of nowhere and the product of nefarious forces working to bring it about. He was convinced that prior to the February Revolution, Russian soldiers were completely committed to the war and fought gallantly despite all of the obstacles they faced. Grow seemed not only to accept that idea that the entire Empire was behind the war effort, but the Russian social and political order itself, never questioning the extent to which this proved to be the greatest barrier to Russian military success or that the peasant-soldier ever could have questioned either the legitimacy of the tsarist system or the war itself. In fact, as indicated above, he benefited from the network of connections based on status and influence that was characteristic of life under the old regime.

Rather than acknowledging the extent to which wartime failures were the result of internal problems, Grow wrote about how pro-German agents worked to spread rumors that broke down morale. The only faults he attributes to the Russian soldiers are their childlike naiveté and susceptibility to external influences. Blissfully unaware of his own biases, Grow claimed he was just 'telling it like it is':

> The book I have written contains no argument. I have tried to tell the simple story of what I saw, to relate my own experiences and impressions in a purely narrative style, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions. My earnest desire is to bring plainly before the American people the heroic fight these peasant soldiers put up while suffering under most adverse conditions in the field and while many baneful influences were at work in the rear, undermining the organization of the Russian government and military machine. (pp. xi-xii)

None of this should be surprising, as it was a view held by many Americans at the time. In a review of Grow's book in 1918 in *The Outlook*, with the amazingly original and succinct title "A Good Book on Russia," correspondent and adventurer George Kennan[20] wrote that despite the fact that dozens of Americans had written on the state of Russia preceding, during, and following the Revolution, most of the information they conveyed was "superficial, inaccurate, and sensational, and some of it is wholly untrustworthy and misleading."[21] But Grow's book was not among them, according to Kennan, who ascribed the failure to correctly depict

[20] This Kennan was the older cousin of the more famous diplomat George F. Kennan, who authored the book mentioned in footnote 3. He was an expert on Russia, having traveled there extensively. He was particular noted for his book *Siberia and the Exile System*.

[21] George Kennan, "A Good Book on Russia," *The Outlook: With Illustrations*, vol. 119 (1918): 128.

the Russian situation to a lack of previous knowledge of Russian history and culture. Despite the fact that Grow did not really possess such knowledge, Kennan asserts that he had remained there long enough to get an "accurate" picture of the situation. The time that Grow spent embedded with the Russian army, serving directly on the front lines and in the trenches, getting to know the Russian officers and soldiers, according to Kennan, gave him the insight necessary to understand the situation in ways that others were unable to.

Grow lamented, and Kennan echoed, conceptions concerning the Russian army, reiterated time and again by other outside observers, and even some insiders, that it was a spectacular fighting force, propelled by undaunted dedication on the part of stoic, courageous, and undyingly loyal peasant-soldiers, but was thwarted by poor leadership, impeded by shortages of weapons, equipment, and ammunition that were the result of betrayal by spies and saboteurs, and undermined by pernicious propaganda. Grow repeated the commonly-held idea that soldiers "never had sufficient rifles" and that "many times they had to wait until rifles could be taken from wounded" and given to them as a result of German intrigue and subterfuge.[22] He called the Russian army "a magnificent fighting machine" prior to the Revolution, and argued it was the effects of the post-February (dis) order that caused the its ultimate collapse. He took the standard, conservative military line asserting that "had the Provisional Government taken a firm stand from the beginning and failed to recognize the soldiers' committees, backing up the generals and officers in their efforts to enforce discipline and retaining the death penalty for insubordination," the Russian army would have been able to maintain coherence and continue being an effective fighting force. Thus, Grow's contribution fits squarely with the contemporary Western and Russian émigré literature that viewed the Revolution an anomaly, a series of calculated machinations by forces working against the interests of Russia.

While his ideas were consistent with many contemporary views of Russia's dedication to the war effort, and certainly patriotism and nationalism were strong among many in the Russian public during the war,[23] they obscure the numerous internal problems that the Russian armed forces faced, as well as the less-than-enthusiastic attitude of many rank-and-file troops toward the war. Although initial mobilization of troops was largely successful, putting over 4 million men from

[22] For the actual reasons behind Russia's supply and distribution problems, many of which were largely resolved by the end of 1915, see Lewis Siegelbaum, *The Politics of Industrial Mobilization in Russia, 1914-1917: A Study of the War-Industries Committees* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

[23] After the war, many scholars, particularly those among the Russian émigré community, advanced the thesis that Russia lacked well-developed sense of nationalism and national duty, which contributed considerably to its failures in the war. Recently, several historians have argued that a sense of belonging to a national community was strongly present in wartime Russia. See for example Melissa Stockdale, *Mobilization the Russian Nation: Patriotism and Citizenship in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Grow's perceptions support the idea of widespread patriotic support for the war effort, but at the same time, seem to indicate that some in the West began to doubt this.

disparate arears of the vast Empire into battle, there were some problems that revealed underlying tensions. Riots and protests against conscription occurred in several regions.[24] As the war dragged on, but long before the effects of the February Revolution were felt, the Russian army suffered from problems of poor morale and lack of discipline like other armies fighting in this war, including fraternization, voluntary surrender, desertion, insubordination, and war-weariness.[25] All of Grow's commentaries seem oblivious to the manifestations of deeply rooted dissatisfaction with the contemporary social, political, and economic structures and systems, but also the tremendous impact of the total war, which proved to be too great a burden for these systems to endure and thus, in many ways, amplified this discontent and provided opportunities for new political forces to capitalize on imperial failure. He entirely missed that the February Revolution had broad military support, as a result of both short and long-term dissatisfaction with the tsarist regime and is incompetency in waging the war. After the February Revolution, which seemed to take him somewhat by surprise, Grow became distraught over what he perceived as licentious behavior on the part of a soldierly that misunderstood the concept of liberty now afforded to them following the fall of tsarism. Instead of accepting the grave responsibility that came with this newfound freedom, the soldiers, according to Grow, merely acted on their base impulses.

Perhaps even more surprising is the nearly complete lack of commentary about the role of the Bolsheviks or any other socialist parties.[26] Grow, unlike

[24] Joshua Sanborn, "The Mobilization of 1914 and the Question of the Russian Nation: A re-examination," *Slavic Review* Vol. 59, No. 2 (Summer 2000): 275-277.

[25] For a better understanding of Russian soldiers' attitudes about the war and the breakdown of the army, see Nikolai N. Golovin, *The Russian Army in the World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931); Joshua Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003); and Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*. vol. 1, *The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April, 1917)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) and *The End of Russian Imperial Army*. vol. 2, *The Road to Soviet Power and Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). On more specific problems of the army, see Marc Ferro, "Russia: Fraternization and Revolution," *Meetings in No Man's Land: Christmas 1914 and Fraternization in the Great War*, (London; Constable, 2007), 212-233; Aleksandr Astashov, "The Other War" on the Eastern Front during the First World War: Fraternization and Making Peace with the Enemy," in Laurie S. Stoff, Anthony Heywood, Boris Kolonitskii, and John Steinberg, eds. *Military Affairs in Russia's Great War and Revolution, 1914-1922, Book 1: Military Experiences.* Russia's Great War and Revolution Series (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, forthcoming) and Paul Simmons, "Desertion in the Russian Army, 1914-1917," in Stoff, et al., *Military Experiences*. For sources in Russian, see Mikhail S. Frenkin, *Russkaia armiia i revoliutsiia 1917-1918* (Munich: Logos, 1978); A. B. Astashov, "Dezertirstvo i bor'ba s nim v tsarskoi armii v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny," *Rossiiskaia istoriia* 4 (2011): 44-52 and Astashov, *Russkii front v 1914-nachale 1917 goda: voennyi opyt i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Novyi Khronogrof, 2014).

[26] The Bolsheviks were a communist party led by Vladimir Lenin, originally the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, who led the second revolution to overthrow

Kennan and many other American observers, is uncharacteristically quiet about the spread of socialist ideology among soldiers. In fact, his only mention of any socialist influence comes only peripherally, when he claims that Russian soldiers were in communication with the International Workers of the World (IWW) in late summer 1917. He does not speak about the creation or actions of the Soviets in 1917 or the Bolsheviks in opposing the war and counterrevolution, in the unrest during the summer of that year, in stopping Kornilov's attempted revolt, or in opposing the Provisional Government. None of the Bolshevik leaders, who were extremely active during the spring and summer of 1917, such as Vladimir Lenin and Lev Trotsky, make it into Grow's story. He does not even connect his comments on the effects of German subterfuge to the Bolsheviks, which was an widely held opinion among many at this time, including the notion that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were German agents. Considering his numerous references to German conspiracies as the source of Russia's troubles, this omission is surprising. Thus, Grow's book stands in stark contrast to many other American accounts of the revolutionary year, many of which devote considerable space to these figures and activities.

Although such absences are somewhat strange, they might be explained by the fact Grow's perspective was somewhat limited. He was no student of Russian history or politics, either before or during his time in the country. He served with a single unit, in specific and delimited areas of the front and associated primarily with officers and soldiers who seemed fiercely loyal to the tsarist regime. He experienced the war only through these finite and narrow contacts and experiences. Thus, this may have a result of the fact the soldiers and officers he served with were not focused on the political situation, but rather on day-to-day issues of survival. Lack of awareness of revolutionary politics was not uncommon among many Russian troops and indicates the importance of the war experience in and of itself, rather than as a precursor to the Revolution. It indicates clearly that the war was an all-consuming event, and the revolution was not necessarily a foregone conclusion (although certainly the impact of the war was substantial in precipitating a national crisis). Moreover, the extent to which the Russian army was revolutionized, and more specifically, Bolshevized, has been the subject of some debate among scholars, but there were definitely groups that were more influenced by radical ideas than others. Arriving a full year after the start of the war, he was unable to assess the processes of conscription and the protests that accompanied mobilization that reflected serious discontent, the lack of identification with the Empire's war aims on the part of millions of peasant soldiers, the tremendous problems associated with industrial organization, supply, and distribution, the devasting defeats suffered by the Russian Army in that first year, or any problems faced by the army such as fraternization with the enemy, voluntary surrender, desertion, or insubordination. He also seemed to have little idea of the pressures on soldiers and their families. He did come into contact with the latter, after the February Revolution, where he mentioned soldiers

the Provisional Government in November 1917 (October according to the old Russian calendar, and thus the reason it is often termed the "October Revolution).

getting letters from home complaining about the hardships their families were facing without their labor participation. But he never seems to make a connection between the suffering of the Russian people and the desire for revolution. In fact, his commentary about shortages of food and scarcity and inflation of necessities on the home front seems to suggest that these were effects, rather than causes, of revolt. He was not in Russia when either Revolution occurred, and spent little time in the capital, Petrograd, where political events were unfolding. He also wrote his story immediately upon returning to the U.S., the finished product appearing in March 1918, before the outbreak of the Russian Civil War.

Nonetheless, it seems doubtful that he would have been completely oblivious to such important aspects of the revolutionary year. One might assume that he intentionally avoided discussing what he could have perceived as controversial issues. Since one of his goals was to convince an American audience that the Russian contribution to the war was a worthy one, he might not have wanted to touch on subject-matter that put them in an unfavorable light, considering the virulent anti-Bolshevik sentiment that prevailed in many American circles.

Despite his biases and the shortcomings of his vision, his memoir is an important source on Russia and its war experience. His descriptions of the action he saw and his role as a medical worker provide us with detailed accounts that reveal much about the experience of participation in mechanized total war. He was distinctly pro-Russian, and even if he was overly optimistic, his commentary provides a counterpoint to many that are biased negatively. Grow never lost faith in the Russians and continued to believe that the sacrifices they made during the war were not in vain. He was heartened by the entry of the United States into the conflict and was certain this would turn the tide in favor of the Entente. Although Grow's narrative stops short before the Russians withdrew from the conflict in early 1918 and one can only wonder what his reaction to this decision would have been, the book nevertheless provides an interesting glimpse into the trials and tribulations that Russia faced during the war. One does get a strong sense of the serious obstacles the country faced in attempting to wage a total war, particularly the challenges involved with industrial warfare, its destructive effect on the human body, and its impact on Russia in this pivotal moment of its history. Therefore, it is a valuable resource in our attempts to further understand the complexities Russia's Great War and Revolution.

**About the Author**

Laurie Stoff is Principal Lecturer and Honors Faculty Fellow at Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on the intersections of gender and war. Her works include *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (University Press of Kansas, 2006) and *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More than Binding Men's Wounds* (UPK, 2015), awarded Best Book in Slavic Studies by the Southern Conference on Slavic Studies and Best Book in European History by the Southern Historical Association. She is lead editor (with Anthony Heywood, Boris Kolonitskii, and John Steinberg) of *Military Affairs in Russia's Great War*

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